

# POINT BLANK in the Promised Land

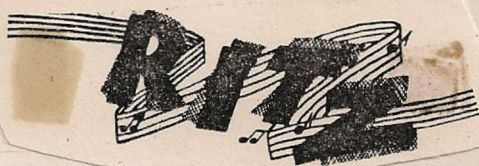
I don't remember too much of my first experience of America, six months in New York in 1963 at the age of five; anyway, I wasn't a Bruce Springsteen fan then! The trip I made in September/October 1982 was my first as a musical pilgrimage as well as a holiday: to discover, to realise - and to exorcise - some American dreams and myths.

## TRAX

I arrived in New York to find I'd missed C.C. and the Red Bank Rockers by a day, and was unlikely to see them play before I left. However, some good news was that Beaver Brown, who'd been taking time off from live work for the first time in about 10 years to record and rest, were playing again with a varying line-up under the name Wild Weekend during my stay, including a couple of nights in Asbury Park as the whole band. My ambition to see them would be fulfilled after all.

In a record store in Greenwich Village I saw copies of Point Blank for sale. The same day I was told that it would be impossible to sell a magazine exclusively devoted to Bruce Springsteen in New York! The same store stocked a gatefold sleeve version of "Nebraska", the European import edition with French and German lyrics on the inner jacket.

Warren Zevon, LA's "Excitable Boy", played a version of "Cadillac Ranch" during his set at the Ritz club, and introduced "Jeannie Needs A Shooter" with a dedication to its composer, saying of "Nebraska": "This album kicked my ass, y'know?"



Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes, label-less but still playing once or twice a month, did a two-night date at the Ritz, enjoyably spontaneous sets including some rare Jukes numbers and a selection of acapella oldies with the support act, The Schoolgirls. About half the original line-up were present, plus Rusty Cloud from Gary U.S. Bonds' band on piano.

## Big Man's West

October began with a visit to Clarence's club, Big Man's West, in Red Bank. My first taste of New Jersey clubland and one of the best nightspots I've been in, with a fine sound and light system and great photos of C.C., the Red Bank Rockers, Bruce and the E Street Band and other artists decorating the walls. Above all, a friendly atmosphere thanks to the welcome of the fine bar staff (one bar is nicknamed Candy's Room). It comes as no surprise that Bruce is often to be seen there.

I spent the night at the Flamingo motel in Asbury Park after seeing such Jersey Shore landmarks as the Fast Lane and Stone Pony clubs,



the Circuit (Kingsley Street and Ocean Avenue), Madam Marie's (closed for fortune telling for the winter, but not busted!), and the endless stretch of the boardwalk. Souvenir stores proudly display the famous postcard used for the cover of "Greetings From Asbury Park, N.J.".

The entrance to the legendary Upstage club can still be seen, the door now marked simply "Up", but another haunt, the Student Prince bar, is no longer to be found. E Street itself is there, as are Bruce's birthplace in Freehold and an old



house of his in Holmdel nearby. The true story of Bruce's first meeting with Clarence at the Wonderbar in Asbury Park has been elaborated in live introductions to "The E Street Shuffle", recalled by Dave Marsh in his "Born To Run" Springsteen biography.

Around midnight on 3 October, two years after the 1980-81 Tour began, Bruce walked onstage at the Stone Pony to front local band Cats On A Smooth Surface, and played no less than 14 songs, including "Open All Night" - the first performance of any "Nebraska" track. He'd been playing encores and occasional songs with various bands in Jersey and New York since the end of the "River" Tour in September 1981, but this was to be his last East Coast appearance of the year, leaving soon after for California to mix the next Springsteen/E Street Band album.

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The welcome return of Beaver Brown the weekend after, together with a first hearing of the long-awaited solo LP from Miami Steve, came as a satisfying end to the trip. George Theiss, an ex-Castile like Bruce, supported the Beavers with his band



at the Fast Lane, proving that the "sound of Asbury Park" is still there. The regular names may change, and the leading lights may grow and move on, though they never forget, and return. Some things just don't change.

See for yourself.

Dan French



## ASBURY PARK ... THE HEART OF THE JERSEY SHORE

